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ABSTRACT

This publication is the second of two dropout reports prepared in 1988-89 for the Houston (Texas) Independent School District. The first report presented dropout data for each of the district's secondary schools as well as for the district as a whole. This follow-up report on HISD's 1988-89 dropouts presents a districtwide perspective on demographic characteristics and at-risk status, as well as an estimated longitudinal dropout rate based on 1988-89 data. The report presents and provides answers to the following research questions: (1) What was the 1988-89 dropout rate for HISD secondary students? (2) What were dropout rates by grade? (3) What were dropout rates by age? (4) What was the racial/ethnic composition of the HISD secondary students who became 1988-89 dropouts? (5) What was the 1988-89 dropout rate for each of the four major racial/ethnic categories in HISD? (6) Have dropout rates by racial/ethnic group changed in relation to one another and in relation to the overall HISD dropout rate over the last 2 years? (7) What percentage of 1988-89 dropouts were previously identified as at-risk students? (8) What were 1988-89 dropout rates by at-risk status? and (9) What is the estimated longitudinal dropout rate for HISD secondary grades (7-12)? A seven-item bibliography is appended. (AF)

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HISD

March 1, 1990

Dropout Report for 1988–89: Part 2

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DROPOUT REPORT FOR 1988–89: PART 2
HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Introduction
Statement of Purpose

The investigation was conducted for the following reasons:

- Though the district has been collecting dropout data since the 1978–79 school year, the 1984 court settlement agreement which ended the desegregation lawsuit (Ross vs. HISD) stipulated that

  > HISD will conduct a study on dropouts with an emphasis on the dropout of Hispanic students. The study will specifically include those students termed dropouts in previous HISD studies and those who leave the school district at the end of a school year and for whom there is no record of future participation in public schools (Section II, paragraph F, sub-paragraph 1).

  This report is a continuation of that effort, though the district's settlement agreement obligations have subsequently been satisfied. This report is also a reflection of HISD's long term commitment to reducing the dropout rate.

- Texas Education Code (21.258) and Texas Administrative Code and Statutory Citations (Section 61.2) detail the requirements for publication of an *Annual Performance Report*. According to those statutes, the district is required to make public its annual attendance data and dropout rates.

The *Dropout Report for 1988–89: Part 2* is the second of two dropout reports presented this year to the General Superintendent and the HISD Board of Education. The first report, titled the *Dropout Report for 1988–89* (December 14, 1989), presented a dropout rate and a dropout census for each of the district's secondary schools as well as for the district as a whole. This follow-up report on HISD's 1988–89 dropouts presents a districtwide perspective on demographic characteristics and at-risk status. The report also presents an *estimated* longitudinal dropout rate based on 1988–89 data.

Objectives of the Inquiry

The investigation was designed to provide answers to the following research questions:

Research Question 1:	*What is the 1988–89 dropout rate for HISD secondary students?*
Research Question 2:	*What are the 1988–89 dropout rates by grade for HISD secondary students?*
Research Question 3:	*What are the 1988–89 dropout rates by age for HISD secondary students?*
Research Question 4:	*What is the racial/ethnic composition of the HISD secondary students who became 1988–89 dropouts?*
Research Question 5:	*What is the 1988–89 dropout rate for each of the four major racial/ethnic categories in HISD?*
Research Question 6:	*Have the dropout rates by racial/ethnic group changed in relation to one another and in relation to the overall HISD dropout rate over the last two years?*
Research Question 7:	*What percentage of the 1988–89 dropouts were previously identified as students at-risk?*
Research Question 8:	*What are the 1988–89 dropout rates by at-risk status for HISD secondary students?*
Research Question 9:	*What is the estimated longitudinal dropout rate for HISD secondary school grades (7–12)?*

Definition of Terms

TEA Definition of a Dropout

According to the Texas Education Agency's *Report on 1987–88 Public School Dropouts from the State Board of Education*, "a student shall be reported as a dropout for a school year if the individual is absent for a period of 30 or more consecutive school days:

1) without *approved excuse or documented transfer* from the public secondary school (grades 7–12) in which he or she enrolled, or
2) if the student fails to re-enroll during the first 30 consecutive school days in the following semester or school year without completion of a high school program."[1]

HISD Definitions of Dropout Categories

The HISD Research Department, following state guidelines, calculates the annual dropout rate (Sept. to Sept.) by categorizing students in terms of their withdrawal code, their enrollment in HISD, and documentation of transfers between HISD and other school districts or private schools. These categories are mutually exclusive and are defined for 1988–89 as follows:

1. The *Evident Dropout* category includes any student
   (a) who exited with a withdrawal code (other than 1, 2, 3, 4), and
   (b) for whom there is no record of a request for transcript from another district, and
   (c) who does not re-enroll in HISD for 1989–90.
2. The *Withdrawn/No Transcript* category includes any student
   (a) who exited during the 1988–89 school year with a withdrawal code (1, 2, 3, 4), and
   (b) for whom a records request from a school outside HISD has never been reported, and
   (c) who does not re-enroll in HISD for 1989–90.
3. The *Summer Disappearance* category includes any student
   (a) who finished the 1988–89 school year active at a campus in HISD, and
   (b) who does not re-enroll at that campus or at any other in HISD for 1989–90, and
   (c) for whom a records request from a school outside HISD was never reported.

[1]Lynn M. Moak, *Report on 1987–88 public school dropouts from the state board of education*, (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, 1989), p. 2.

Definition of Terms
Continued

Definition of HISD Withdrawal Codes

The HISD Student Master File withdrawal codes that are used in the dropout accounting process are defined as follows:

Withdrawal Code 1 The student moved but will attend another school in HISD.

Withdrawal Code 2 The student moved and will attend a private school.

Withdrawal Code 3 The student moved and will attend school in another Texas school district.

Withdrawal Code 4 The student moved and will attend school in another school district outside of Texas.

Other Related Definitions

TEA Fall Survey of Pupils in Membership

A one day census of students enrolled conducted in October by every public school in Texas and report to the Texas Education Agency.

TEA Fall Survey Method of Dropout Accounting

A formula for calculating dropout rates that divides the number of identified dropouts by school district enrollment as counted one a single day in October for the TEA Fall Survey of Pupils in Membership.

HISD Cumulative Enrollment Method of Dropout Accounting

A formula for calculating dropout rates that divides the number of identified dropouts by school district enrollment determined as the total number of students enrolled during the course of the entire school year.

Limitations

- The degree to which 1988–89 HISD dropout data can be reliably compared to data for 1987–88 is not known. Though the accounting methods used are the same, new verification procedures introduced for 1988–89 improved the accuracy of the dropout census for that year.

Review of Literature

Under the provisions of state statute, Texas Education Code 11.205(d), the Texas Education Agency is required to file a dropout report by January 31 of each odd-numbered year. The latest results available from TEA were published in the *Report on 1987–88 Public School Dropouts from the State Board of Education* (July, 1989). The major findings of that report are reproduced here as context with which to view the outcomes of this investigation. It should be noted, however, that the HISD student population is demographically dissimilar to the Texas student population.

> A total of 87,803 students were reported as dropping out from grades 7 through 12 during and immediately after the 1987–88 school year. Using the *Fall Survey of Pupils in Membership*, this represents a 6.4% dropout rate for the 1987–88 year. Of this total, 52,590 students (60%) dropped out during the regular 1987–88 school year. The remainder, 35,213 (40%) dropped out during the summer of 1988, failing to re-enroll for the 1988–89 school year. Seventy percent of all dropouts in 1987–88 were students who either did not complete the grade level enrolled in during this reporting year or were not promoted to the next grade level at the end of the school year. The remaining 30% dropped out after successfully completing the year and being promoted to the next grade level. Of the total number of dropouts, 42% were white, 39% were Hispanic, 17% were Black, 2% were Asian, and .2% were American Indian.
>
> The largest concentration of dropouts was reported for the ninth grade. Analysis of dropouts by grade level, comparing numbers of dropouts in the 7th through 9th grades with dropouts in 10th through 12th grades, suggests that there is a tendency for Hispanic students to drop out earlier, while whites tend to drop out later. Blacks appear to drop out in equal proportions relative to these grade divisions. Nine percent (8,201) of the dropouts reported were identified as special education students.
>
> The highest numbers of dropouts were reported in school districts with the largest student enrollments, the lowest in districts with the smallest number of students. Major urban school districts reported the greatest number of dropouts, rural areas the fewest. There appeared to be little correlation between number of dropouts reported and the wealth of the district, but there did appear to be a significant correlation between minority percentages of students enrolled and numbers of dropouts, the greater the percentage minority, the higher the dropout numbers reported.[2]

[2]Moak, *Report on 1987–88 public school dropouts from the state board of education*, p. 6.

Review of Literature

continued

These statistics for the state of Texas can be roughly compared to recently published figures for the nation as a whole. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that "between October 1985 and October 1988, an average of 4.4 percent of all students in grades 10–12 dropped out of high school."[3] Concerning the issue of trends in national dropout rates the report further found that "despite the popular impression that dropout rates have been rising, in fact dropout rates have been declining over the past ten years. Rates have declined for both blacks and whites, with sharper declines for blacks. The rates for Hispanics have not declined."

The Center's report goes on to elaborate:

> The dropout rate has declined about two percent over the past ten years. It was 6.6 percent in 1978. The proportion of 16– to 24–year-olds out of school and not high school graduates has gradually decreased over the past 20 years from 16 to 12 percent. Dropout rates for blacks have declined considerably, resulting in a narrowing of the differential between black and white dropout rates — from 13 percent in 1968 to 2 percent in 1988 among 16– to 24–year-olds. There has been no consistent trend in Hispanic dropout rates upward or downward over the past 15 years. Hispanic dropout rates have remained high throughout the period. For example, between 9 and 11 percent of Hispanic students dropped out of high school each year.

While these findings are an important part of the total dropout picture, it must be noted that the HISD student population is demographically dissimilar to the student population of the United States as a whole. Furthermore, the 4.4 percent national dropout rate reported by the Center is significantly lower as a result of omitting ninth grade dropouts from the calculations. Dropout studies undertaken by HISD and the Texas Education Agency show that the ninth grade has the highest dropout rate of the four high school grade levels.

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[3]Mary J. Frase, *Dropout rates in the United States: 1988* (Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, September 1989), p. x.

Treatment of Data

The dropout rate is a simple function of the number of dropouts divided by the total student enrollment. The Texas Education Agency calculates dropout rates based on the Fall Survey of Pupils in Membership, which is reported annually by all Texas school districts to the TEA. However, because the Fall Survey is essentially a "snapshot headcount" of student enrollment, it results in inaccuracies for districts like HISD that have high student mobility rates: "Caution should be used when using this fall count as the 'denominator' for dropout rate calculations... The fall survey counts may not adequately reflect the student mobility that occurs within and across school districts over the course of the school year."[4] For this reason HISD has developed a cumulative enrollment dropout accounting method that accounts for all students who were active on a given campus at any time during the school year.

The *Dropout Report for 1988–89* presented dropout rates as calculated by both the TEA Fall Survey method and the HISD Cumulative Enrollment method of dropout accounting. *This follow-up report, however, presents only findings that are based on the cumulative enrollment method.*

HISD Dropout Formula Based on Cumulative Enrollment

$$\textit{DROPOUT RATE} = \frac{\textit{Total Dropouts}}{\textit{Cumulative Enrollment}}$$

The dropout rate operands are as follows:

Total Dropouts = Evident Dropouts
+ Withdrawn/No Transcript
+ Summer Disappearances

Cumulative Enrollment = the total number of students enrolled during the year as derived from the HISD Student Master File of 1988–89.

Estimated Longitudinal Dropout Rate

The *estimated* longitudinal dropout rate for 1988–89 (research question nine) is obtained through calculations using annual dropout rates in which the specific dropout rates for grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 are applied to a single cohort of students entering the ninth grade.[5]

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[4]Moak, *Report on 1987–88 public school dropouts from the state board of education*, p. 3.

[5]James L. Parsons, Elaine Say, and James F. McNamara, Texas A&M school/university research collaborative 1987–88 student dropout research project: An aggregate report of nine collaborative school districts. *Presented at the Collaborative Research Conference*, The Woodlands, Texas, January 12, 1989).

Analysis of Data

Results of this investigation are provided for each of the individual research questions. The findings are presented on the pages that follow.

Research Question 1

What is the 1988–89 dropout rate for HISD secondary students?

1988–89 HISD Dropout Rates
Based on the Cumulative Enrollment Dropout Accounting Method

Grades 9–12	12.8%
Grades 9–12 (excluding alternative schools)*	12.6%
Grades 7–8	7.3%
Grades 7–8 (excluding alternative schools)	7.2%
Grades 7–12	10.9%
Grades 7–12 (excluding alternative schools)	10.6%

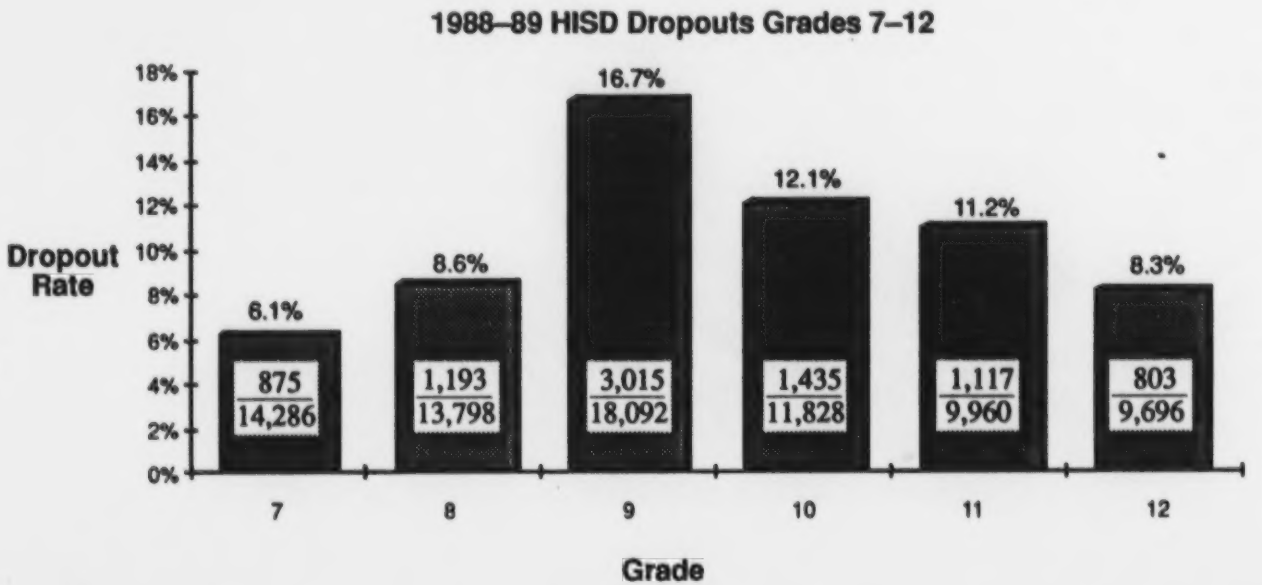
Trends

- Comparison of the dropout rates for grades 7–8 and for grades 9–12 indicate higher dropout rates for the higher grades. Including grades 7–8 produces a 1.9% decrease in the overall district rate.
- Rates for each grade grouping presented above are reduced approximately 0.2% when rates for alternative schools are not included.

* HISD operates eight alternative schools to address the needs of students who require a special environment in which to continue their education. These schools are H. P. Carter, Contemporary Learning Center, Contemporary Occupational Training Center, Foley's Academy, Harper Secondary Alternative School, Harris County Youth Village, Houston Night High School, and Kay On-Going Education.

Research Question 2

What are the 1988–89 dropout rates by grade for HISD secondary students?



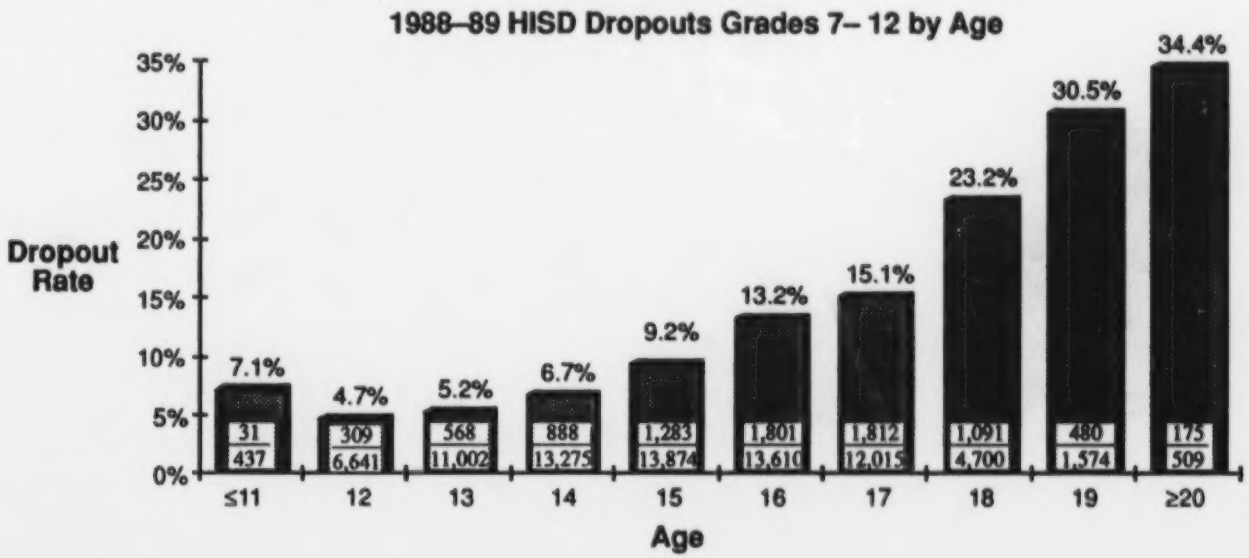
Note: The fractions superimposed on each column of the graph represent the number of dropouts over the total cumulative enrollment for each grade level.

Trends

- The largest concentration of dropouts is found in the ninth grade. This finding is consistent with statewide trends observed for 1987–88 as reported by the Texas Education Agency (July, 1989).

Research Question 3

What are the 1988–89 dropout rates by age for HISD secondary students?



Note: The fractions superimposed on each column of the graph represent the number of dropouts over the total cumulative enrollment for each age group.

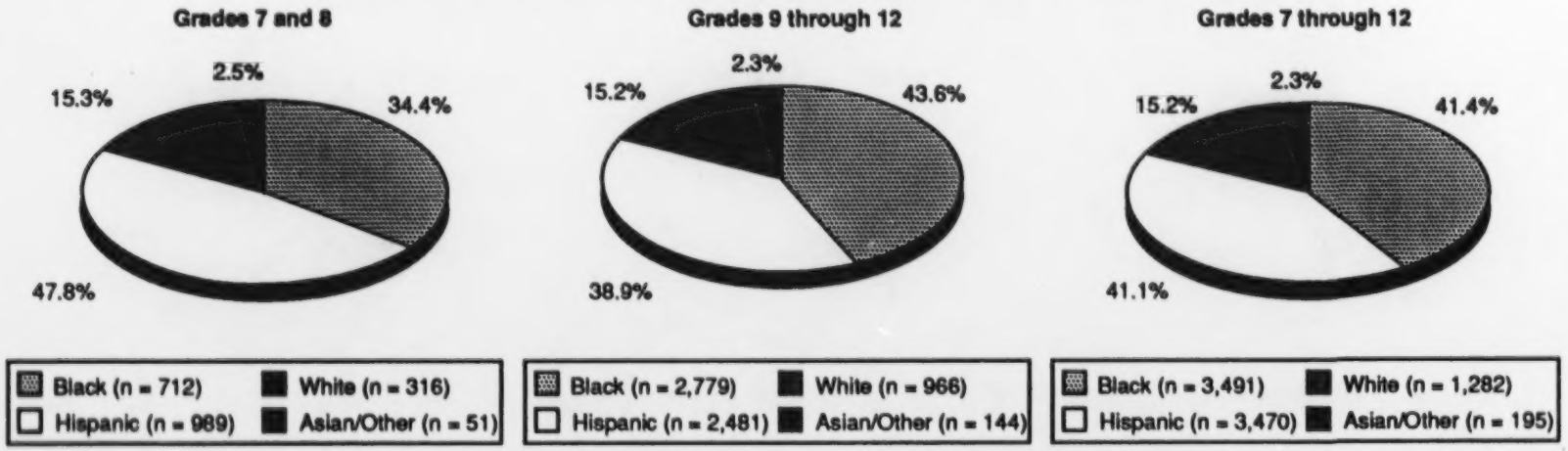
Trends

- For each age bracket from 12 years and up, the dropout rate increases steadily, with a marked increase (4%) between 15 and 16 years (grade 9). The dropout rate then increases dramatically for students 18 years old and older.

Research Question 4

What is the racial/ethnic composition of the HISD secondary students who became 1988–89 dropouts?

1988–89 HISD Dropouts by Racial/Ethnic Category and Grade Groupings



Trends

- Hispanic students comprise the highest percentage of HISD dropouts in grades 7 and 8 by a wide margin. In grades 9–12, Black students comprise the highest percentage but by a narrow margin. For all secondary students (grades 7–12), Black and Hispanic dropout numbers are virtually equal.

- White students consistently account for approximately 15 percent of HISD's dropout population in the three groupings.

Research Question 5

What is the 1988–89 dropout rate for each of the four major racial/ethnic categories in HISD?

1988–89 HISD Dropout Rates by Racial/Ethnic Category

	Grades 7 and 8			Grades 9–12			Grades 7–12		
	Dropout	*Enrolled*	*Rate*	*Dropout*	*Enrolled*	*Rate*	*Dropout*	*Enrolled*	*Rate*
Black	712	11,237	6.3%	2,779	21,378	13.0%	3,491	32,615	10.7%
Hispanic	989	11,511	8.6%	2,481	16,401	15.1%	3,470	27,912	12.4%
White	316	4,579	6.9%	966	10,074	9.6%	1,282	14,653	8.7%
Asian/Other	51	757	6.7%	144	1,723	8.4%	195	2,480	7.9%
Total	2,068	28,084	7.4%	6,370	49,576	12.8%	8,438	77,660	10.9%

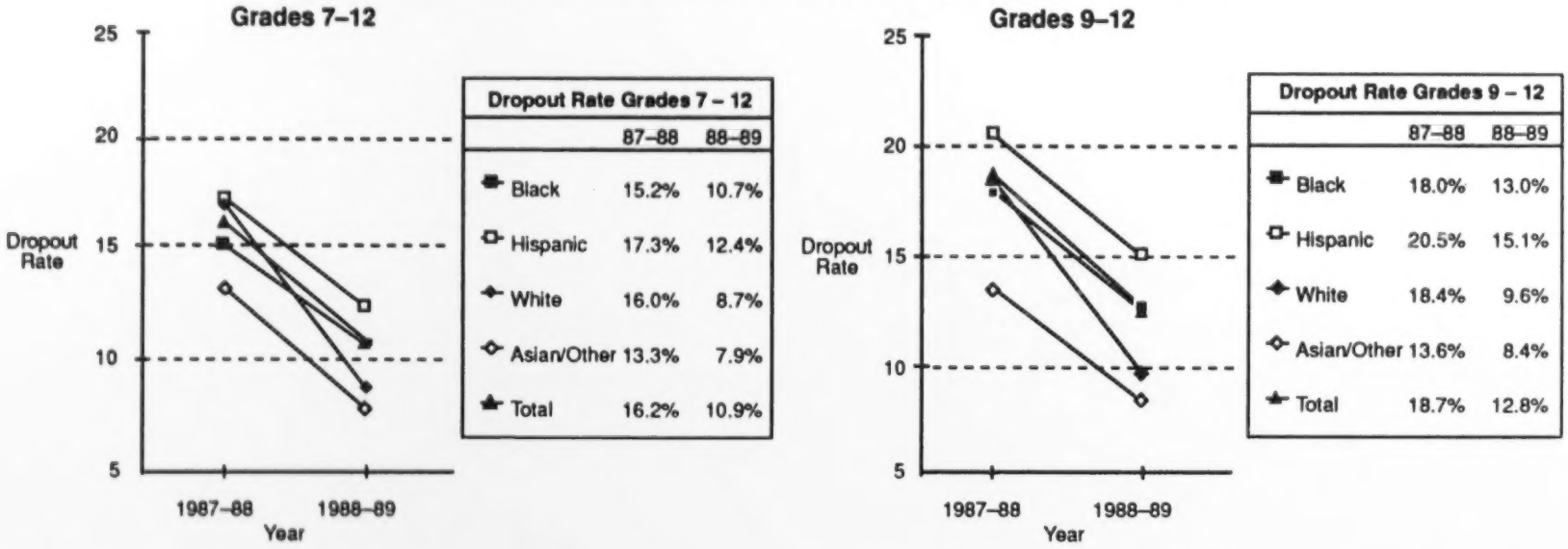
Trends

- For all ethnic groups, dropout rates in grades 9–12 are consistently higher than dropout rates for grades 7 and 8.
- HISD's Hispanic students are observed to drop out in greater frequency than students in other ethnic groups in each of the grade groupings presented above.
- Rates for Black students are comparable to those of White and Asian students at grades 7 and 8 but are higher than White and Asian rates at grades 9–12.

Research Question 6

Have the dropout rates by racial/ethnic group changed in relation to one another and in relation to the overall HISD dropout rate over the last two years?

1987–88 and 1988–89 HISD Dropout Rates by Racial/Ethnic Categories



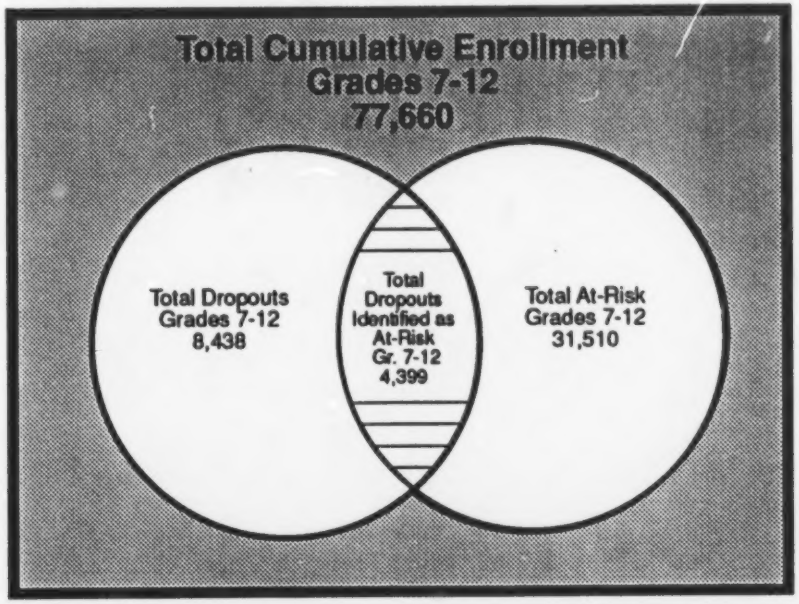
Trends

- Over the last two years, the district's dropout rate for all secondary students (grades 7–12) has declined from 16.2% to 10.9%. For all high school students (grades 9–12) the dropout rate has fallen from 18.7% to 12.8%.

- Dramatic declines are reported for all ethnic groups. The degree to which these declines can be attributed to any specific causes is not ascertainable. It is likely that new verification procedures introduced to the dropout accounting process and dropout prevention efforts have both had a favorable impact.

Introduction to Research Questions 7 and 8

Dropout Rates by At-Risk Status

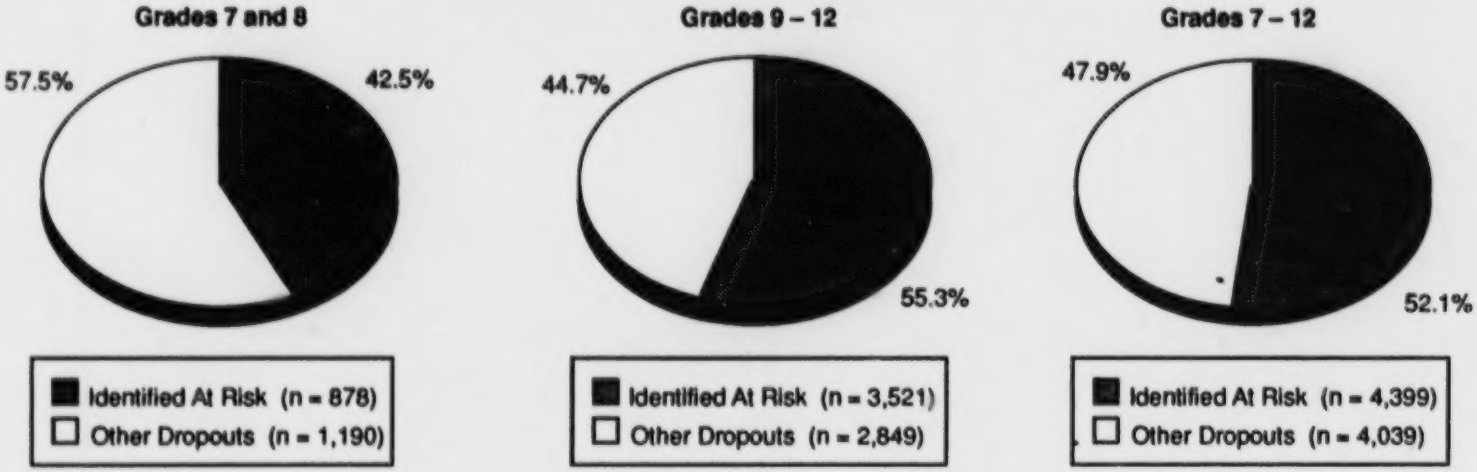


The study of dropouts by at-risk status (research questions seven and eight) shows the degree to which at-risk criteria identify students who drop out of school. Results of this study are presented in a series of pie charts for the district as a whole (question seven) and in a table for each grade level (question 8). Districtwide results for grades 7–12 are also shown in the diagram above.

Research Question 7

What percentage of the 1988–89 dropouts were previously identified as students at-risk?

1988–89 HISD Dropouts Identified as At-Risk



Trends

- The four established at-risk identifiers (failed any section of TEAMS last year, failed 2 or more basic subjects last year, below grade level on MAT6 in reading or mathematics achievement, overage as an approximation of retention) correctly identified slightly more than half (52.1%) of the 1988–89 dropouts.
- Perhaps the most interesting finding presented in this report is the fact that nearly half of the HISD dropouts were *not* previously identified as at-risk. This finding suggests that further research may be warranted in the effort to define at-risk identifiers.

Research Question 8

What are the 1988–89 dropout rates by at-risk status for HISD secondary students?

1988–89 HISD Dropouts by At-Risk Status Grades 7 – 12

GRADE	① Total Student Enrollment	② Total Students Identified as At-Risk[1]	③ Number of Dropouts by Grade[2]	④ Number of Dropouts Identified as At-Risk[3]	⑤ Dropout Rate for Students Identified as At-Risk[4]	⑥ Dropout Rate for Students NOT Identified as At-Risk[5]
7	14,286	5,798 (40.6%)	875 (6.1%)	338 (38.6%)	5.8%	6.3%
8	13,798	6,397 (46.4%)	1,193 (8.6%)	540 (45.3%)	8.4%	8.8%
9	18,092	8,399 (46.4%)	3,015 (16.7%)	1,748 (58.0%)	20.8%	13.1%
10	11,828	6,350 (53.7%)	1,435 (12.1%)	816 (56.9%)	12.9%	11.3%
11	9,960	2,336 (23.4%)	1,117 (11.2%)	522 (46.7%)	22.3%	7.8%
12	9,696	2,230 (23.0%)	803 (8.3%)	435 (54.2%)	19.5%	4.9%
TOTAL	77,660	31,510 (40.6%)	8,438 (10.9%)	4,399 (52.1%)	14.0%	8.8%

[1] The percentage of Total Students Identified as At-Risk is calculated by dividing column 1 into column 2.
[2] The percentage of the Number of Dropouts by Grade is calculated by dividing column 1 into column 3.
[3] The percentage of the Number of Dropouts Identified as At-Risk is calculated by dividing column 3 into column 4.
[4] The Dropout Rate for Students Identified as At-Risk is calculated by dividing column 2 into column 4.
[5] The Dropout Rate for Students NOT Identified as At-Risk is calculated by dividing column 1 minus column 2 into column 3 minus column 4.

Trends

- Secondary students who had been identified as at-risk dropped out of school in 1988–89 at a rate of 14 percent. Students not identified as at-risk display a lower (8.8%) dropout rate.
- The dropout rates by grade for at-risk students seem to imply that the at-risk criteria are better indicators of potential dropouts at the higher grade levels (9 – 12).
- At grades 9–12, students identified as at-risk dropped out at a significantly higher rate than those not identified as at-risk ($p \leq .0001$ at grades 9, 11 and 12; $p \leq 0.01$ at grade 10).

Research Question 9

What is the ESTIMATED longitudinal dropout rate for HISD secondary school grades (7 – 12)?

These **estimated longitudinal dropout rates** provide a projection (based on current year dropout rates) of the probabililty that a student entering each of grades 7–12 will drop out before graduating from high school. Each rate is derived as the cumulative result of applying 1988–89 annual dropout rates for all of the grade levels from the point at which the projection originates to grade 12 (graduation). For example, we calculate the estimated longitudinal dropout rate for all HISD seventh graders as follows:

$$100 - \left[(1 - 0.061)\,(1 - 0.086)\,(1 - 0.167)\,(1 - 0.121)\,(1 - 0.112)\,(1 - 0.83)\,100\right] = 48.9$$

The figures reported below for each grade level represent the rates at which students from each grade may be expected to drop out before graduating.

Longitudinal Dropout Rate Estimated by Using 1988–89 Annual Dropout Rates

Grade	1988–89 Annual Grade Level Dropout Rate	Estimated Longitudinal Dropout Rates				
		Black	Hispanic	White	Asian	Total HISD
7	6.1%	48.2%	53.9%	41.8%	38.6%	48.9%
8	8.6%	45.3%	50.4%	38.5%	33.9%	45.5%
9	16.7%	41.0%	44.7%	32.9%	29.5%	40.4%
10	12.1%	29.2%	31.3%	24.0%	22.6%	28.4%
11	11.2%	19.3%	20.7%	14.9%	16.6%	18.6%
12	8.3%	8.6%	9.6%	6.1%	8.8%	8.3%

Trends

- These estimates suggest that 48.9% of entering HISD seventh graders can be expected to drop out before graduating and that 40.4% of entering ninth graders will not complete high school.
- Estimates indicate that the chances of graduating increase dramatically the longer a student remains in school. While nearly half of HISD seventh graders can be projected to drop out, only one out of every eight twelfth graders is likely to drop out.

Discussion

Methodology

HISD first undertook dropout studies in 1979, and since that time the methods of dropout accounting have evolved considerably. As complications involved in dropout accounting became evident, substantive changes were made in the operational definition of a dropout, the algorithms used to calculate dropout rates, and the student accounting procedures used in the district. Given the degree of change that has occurred, a reasonable presentation of HISD dropouts can, at present, be made only for 1987–89.

A comparison of these last two academic years, however, must itself be carefully qualified. It is likely that new verification procedures introduced to the dropout accounting process and on-going dropout prevention efforts have both had a favorable impact on the dropout rate, but the degree to which the declines reported here can be attributed to any specific cause is not ascertainable. As a result, it is left open to question whether or not 1988–89 dropout data can be reliably compared to data for 1988–88.

Interpretation

Dropout accounting is and always will be an inexact science in a free society where families are able to move at any time for any reason to any part of the country they choose without the constant scrutiny of government bureaucracies. Therefore, the proper object of dropout studies is *not* merely an accurate census of dropouts. The proper object of such studies is instead the identification of trends to which effective responses can be made.

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